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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6788

INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/16/2016

TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER LE SY IS

SUBJECT: LEBANON: LEBANESE FORCES MOVING TOWARD COUNTER DEMONSTRATIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (b).

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) One of the political advisors to Lebanese Forces (LF) leader Samir Ja'ja' stated that the majority of LF's leadership is angry at the unrelenting media coverage of the anti-government street demonstrations that have taken place since last Friday. Arguments that March 14 pro-government forces must answer the Hizballah-FPM show of force are becoming more persuasive to the leadership of the second most important bloc in the country's Christian community. Samir Ja'ja' in particular feels that Nasrallah and Michel Aoun need to be reminded that they are not the only leaders with popular support in Lebanon. End Summary.

¶12. (C) Elie Khoury, a political advisor who has good ties to the LF leadership, but who is not a member of the inner circle, informed emboff on December 5 that Samir Ja'ja' is receiving near unanimous advice from his party leadership that the current display of Hizballah power is steadily eroding support for the government, partly from intimidation, but mostly due to political fatigue on the part of Lebanon's citizenry, which is still trying to recover from the debilitating July-August conflict.

FIGHTING THE IMAGE OF INEVITABILITY

¶13. (C) According to Khoury, part of the frustration now being felt by the Lebanese Forces stems from the fact that LF MP George Adwan, with backing from Ja'ja', had been trying "for months" to establish a dialogue with Michel Aoun and has little to show for it. (Note: This assessment contrasts with a description by Aounist MP Ibrahim Kanaan of the same channel as effective and reliable. End note.) Samir Ja'ja' has reportedly "had enough" of Hizballah-Aounist speeches which rake Siniora and March 14 over the coals each night, followed by one-sided "interviews" that give no indication of a March 8 readiness to compromise. Ja'ja' is deeply concerned that Lebanon and the world see only one force in the streets -- leading to the logical conclusion that pro-democratic forces are close to throwing in the towel.

¶14. (C) Even though Ja'ja' is convinced that his arch-adversary Michel Aoun is blindly following Hizballah's (and Syria's) guidance, Khoury said he is willing to back one last March 14 effort to reach across the political divide. But that effort should be made from a position of strength, which can only be re-created by a show of force in the

streets of downtown Beirut. Khoury stated that for March 14 to enter into negotiations with its present passive posture would almost guarantee the end of the pro-reform movement, and with it, a democratic Lebanon.

¶5. (C) A message was passed to Ja'ja's advisor that if March 14 felt compelled to take to the streets to counter the increasingly confident Hizballah-Aounist bloc, it should physically position its supporters far away from Riad Solh Square and Martyr's Square. Khoury indicated he would pass that advice to Ja'ja', but pointedly asked why Hizballah and the "blindly ambitious" Aoun should "own" that highly symbolic space.

FELTMAN